

Unit written by Dr Pam Macintyre & Dr Susan La Marca

## ***Destroying Avalon* by Kate McCaffrey**

**YEAR 9 - 10**

### **Background**

*Before I became a full-time writer I was a high school teacher. The last school I worked in was a technology school, and it was at this school that I saw the beginnings of cyber bullying. Kids were using email and internet accounts to sledge other kids...cyber bullying, for the 'always on' generation is a 24/7 deal. Traditionally victims are safe, once they reach their homes. But with this technology the harassment is never ending, overwhelming and soul-destroying'*  
Kate McCaffrey, Teachers Notes at  
<[www.fremantlepress.com.au/images/Destroying%20Avalon%20Teach%20Notes.pdf](http://www.fremantlepress.com.au/images/Destroying%20Avalon%20Teach%20Notes.pdf)>

*Cyber bullying has taken off in a big way, with a recent survey revealing that 42% of girls between the ages of 12 and 15 have been on the receiving end of destructive mail. It's particularly insidious because often tormentors can disguise or hide their identity - allowing them extra licence to wreak emotional havoc on their victim. And girls apparently are more likely to be involved in cyber bullying than boys'* Radio National 18<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2007 Producer - Annie Thomson

Kate McCaffrey recently appeared on the ABC program 'Difference of Opinion' to discuss the issue of technology and young people. The text and a podcast can be found at: <[www.abc.net.au/tv/differenceofopinion](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/differenceofopinion)>

# DESTROYING Avalon

**Kate McCaffrey**

## Girls more likely to suffer cyberbullying

**Staff and agencies**

**Thursday March 22, 2007**

[EducationGuardian.co.uk](http://EducationGuardian.co.uk)

Teenage girls are being targeted most often in a dramatic increase in cyberbullying by text message, email and video clips passed around on classmates' mobile phones.

Those at the receiving end report having fewer friends and are more likely to feel lonely at school, claims Nathalie Noret, of York St John University, and Professor Ian Rivers, of Queen Margaret's University, Edinburgh.

The researchers found that reports of bullying using new technologies among secondary pupils - boys and girls - had jumped from 14.5% five years ago to over 20% in 2006. For girls, levels were consistent each year, but among boys there were both increases and decreases. According to Ms Noret, girls are more likely to resort to covert forms of aggression.

The findings, reported to the British Psychological Society's annual conference at York University yesterday, are based on a survey of nearly 15,000 secondary school pupils over five years. Schoolchildren were asked about their experiences at breaktimes and how many friends they had, as well as whether they had received "nasty or threatening" texts or email messages.

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/pupilbehaviour/story/0,,2040328,00.html>

### Plot summary

Avalon moves from rural Western Australia to the city, following her mother's change of job. Popular, academically able, captain of the hockey team at her previous school, Avalon becomes the target of vindictive, nasty, lying cyber bullying at her new school much to her bemusement. Despite having supportive parents, Avalon is unable to confess what is happening to her, until the focus shifts to a much more vulnerable friend, Marshall, with tragic consequences



Girls were more likely to resort to more covert forms of aggression, such as text messaging, according to the new study. Photograph: Guardian

Kate McCallreay

when cyber bullying incites physical violence. Avalon's parents and the school take action to identify the perpetrators, but not before lives have been changed for ever.

Avalon is convinced that Alice, one of the 'cool girls' is responsible, leading to further misunderstandings and prejudices.

'Metallica Man' and 'Dragon Girl' are particularly nasty, and the effects on Avalon's self esteem are devastating. The book takes an innovative approach on several fronts: Avalon is not an obvious victim apart from being a new student to the school, the identity of Dragon Girl will surprise as will that of Metallica Man. There is no ready way to identify bullies: they come in many guises.

### Objectives

- To explore how the individual's and society's values are formed and adapt in a rapidly changing world. Bullying is not new, but the anonymity afforded by electronic communication means it can now operate far more viciously than in face-to-face confrontations. This links strongly to the VELS for Physical, Personal and Social Learning – Civics and Citizenship:

*At Level 5, students present points of view on contemporary issues and events using appropriate supporting evidence. They explain the different perspectives on some contemporary issues and propose possible solutions to problems. Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) VELS Physical, Personal and Social Learning – Civics and Citizenship Level 6 p17.*

- To explore ideas of individual responsibility and morality.

### Focus: Outsiders and Victims

- This is a theme that has been explored often in literature (For instance Camus' *The Outsider*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Golding's *Lord of the Flies*), and especially in literature for young adults (see further reading list). We all want to belong, to have friends, to feel we 'fit' somewhere. Why is it that this is difficult for some people?
- Some individuals stand out from the crowd and 'make' themselves outsiders and potential victims on the basis of principle, such as Jerry Renault in Cormier's *The Chocolate War* or Web in *Killing Aurora* by Helen Barnes. What gives some people such moral strength?

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- Avalon seems an unlikely victim – popular, talented, sporty and attractive. What makes her a target?
- There are those who are ‘outsiders’ for all sorts of reasons, such as Josephine Alibrandi and her friends at their ‘posh’ private school (*Looking for Alibrandi* by Melina Marchetta), and Alice Pung at her school in *Unpolished Gem* (class and ethnicity), but who never become victims.
  - What or who, then ‘makes’ someone a victim?
  - Consider in the light of the books mentioned below.
- The other side of the coin is what makes individuals want to exclude their fellow human beings, belittle them, abuse them?
- Just as standing up for principle is a sign of strength, is bullying, especially anonymous cyber bullying, an indicator of cowardice and weakness?
- Consider bullying in a wider, global context. Find examples of what you think is bullying in newspapers, magazines, television etc. Can nations be bullies?

### Role-play/Mime

- Without words, present a short mime that captures how a bullied victim feels. You may like to select a particular setting, eg arriving at school, running into other classmates at the coffee shop, or shopping centre, playing in the same sporting team outside of school.
- Now, present another mime where this time you are the bully/bullies. Again, enact this in a specific situation.
- Now write a poem about how you felt in both situations, and/or paint the emotions. You might like to write your poem using sms language for added effect (see p 7 in *Destroying Avalon*).
- Choose music to accompany your poems/paintings.

### Assessment

*[Students] critically evaluate the spoken language of others and select, prepare and present spoken texts for specific audiences and purposes. ...When listening to others, students ask clarifying questions and build on the ideas of others. They identify key ideas and take notes. They show an awareness of the influence of audience on the construction and presentation of spoken texts, and of how situational and sociocultural factors affect audience responses.* Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English Domain Level 5* p23

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Speaking and listening is an integral part of learning, and of responding to texts. This particular text, and the above ideas for exploring its central premise, is best evaluated through the oral medium.

### Debate

Conduct a formal debate about one of the following topics:

- There will always be bullies in the world while there are those willing to be victims.
- The anonymity provided by Information Communications Technology promotes cyber bullying.

Some students will participate in the debate itself; others will take an active role as audience members in light of the VELS statement above. The quality of the arguments and the persuasiveness of delivery will be assessed by the students.

### Further Reading

Barnes, Helen *Killing Aurora*  
Brugman, Alyssa *Walking Naked*  
Burke, J.C. *Faking Sweet*  
Clark, Judith *Night Train*  
Cormier, Robert *The Chocolate War*  
Portman, Frank *King Dork*  
Goobie, Beth *The Lottery*  
Howell, Simone *Notes from the Teenage Underground*  
Jonsberg, Barry *Dreamrider*  
Marchetta, Melina *Looking for Alibrandi*  
Nunn, Cameron *Shadows in the Mirror*  
Parker, Michael *Doppelganger*  
Salinger, JD *The Catcher in the Rye*  
Walters, Celeste *The Killing of Mudeye*

MOVING  
Avalon

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